

Pathways

THE CHRIS DEWEY PROFESSIONAL SERVICES NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 22 ISSUE 3

APRIL 2018

Excellence



CONTENTS

Excellence	1
Two Arrows.....	2
All Seeing I	3

*“You have just one imperative:
Live each moment with the
most open, generous heart you
can have, with the most magic
and faith you can summon”*

Judith Orloff



© 2018 Chris Dewey
Professional Services LLC.

I like to think of excellence as a renewable and sustainable human resource. Excellence isn't a static phenomenon either, it is a dynamic constant.

Let's start with Aristotle and go from there: *“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. **We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.**”*

The key lesson for me was that excellence is a moving target. What was excellent for me yesterday is no longer excellent today, at least not if I am striving to discover my true potential. Consider this: When I take an exam, even if I get a 100%, I am only presenting a subset of the knowledge that I have acquired on the subject matter at hand, which itself is a subset of what is currently known by all mankind, which itself is a subset of the full breadth and depth of what is potentially knowable and yet has been either forgotten, discarded or not yet discovered. There is always more to learn, which brings back the idea that the more I know, the more that I know that in reality, I know nothing.

So, if we play this out a bit further, I may turn in an excellent performance, but if I move up the spectrum of performance and continue to excel, then what defined excellence at an earlier level has moved with me. It is a function of my training, and the habits that they have created that I can reach further, dig deeper, learn more, do better than I did at an earlier stage in the process.

When I used to train martial arts athletes for competition I sort of had this unwritten rule that if one of my competitors was winning 80% of his/her

matches at a particular level, they were ready for a bigger challenge to stretch them and help them to discover deeper potential.

Isn't that the point then? Discovering your potential in life? Anything less than that could be seen as a disservice to yourself and all those whom you encounter on the journey of life.

So let's touch on perfection for a moment... To me, telling someone that they have reached a level of perfection is the kiss of death...it kills further striving, because by definition, perfection leaves no room for further growth...and isn't that what we are talking about here? Continuous learning and growing?

So what if I turn in a sub-par performance? Did I do my best with what I had in the moment? If so, no matter what the score, it was excellent for me at that moment, precisely because it was a function of the training and habits that I employed. Consequently, I am not condoning lack-lustre performance as a function of lassitude or laziness. I am saying that I am responsible for what I do in the moment, but cannot control all outcomes.

I guess, in reality all I am doing is giving a commentary on Aristotle. Excellence is how we train ourselves to live, it is a habit...nothing more.

Finally, lest you think I am talking about A-type personalities or over-achievers, I am most assuredly not. I am talking about making a decision to discover your deepest potential and then creating the training tools that will enable you to do just that.

Excellence beckons to each of us, all the time...what do you choose to do about that?

☺

Two Arrows

Shakespeare talks to us about the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”. The Buddhists talk to us about the Two Arrows.

Suffering is about the two arrows. Indulge me for a moment, and I will attempt to explain.

We are all familiar with the external arrows of ‘outrageous fortune’. Stuff happens. That’s simply an aspect of living. We ‘fail’ at things, we lose relationships, we lose careers, we get sick, we endure setbacks in all aspects of living.

Or do we?

O.K., yes, on the surface we all experience these things in our lives one way or another. It is not the event, however, that is of significance.

The event itself is merely the first arrow.

The second arrow is what we choose to do with the event.

Each ‘setback’ can be seen as the proximal cause of our suffering, should we choose it to be so. Equally, each event can lead us to deeper awareness, deeper learning and new opportunities. Again, should we so choose it to be so.

I can’t speak for the rest of you, but I am not so all powerful as to be able to control all the events of my life, nor the outcomes of those events...no matter how hard I might like to believe that I can.

I can, however, choose how I respond to those events...and that is the where the second arrow comes into play.

I am the one who shoots the second arrow at myself when I choose the

path of victimhood and suffering.

Understand that an event might cause me deep emotional, physical, social, or financial pain. Perhaps no other event is more potentially devastating as the end of a deep relationship or the death of a loved one. Be that as it may, no matter what the nature of the initial arrow, I am perforce given the opportunity to process the consequence(s) of the event and the potential pain(s) that might result.

It is one thing to process pain, to work through it; it is another to suffer. I can receive pain as a teacher, or I can view it as something to be resisted. I can view the events of life that knock me off-balance as obstacles to be overcome, or I can view them as opportunities to grow.

I can view any event in life from multiple perspectives, but since I am not sufficiently omniscient as to be able to see the eventual outcome of any event, it is not particularly wise for me to think that I do understand the implications of any given event. But I do like to pretend that I do. Don’t you? Somehow it is sort of comfortable to pretend, isn’t it?

Saying “I don’t know what this means”, or saying “I don’t know how this will unfold”, or saying “I don’t know how to handle this” is an admission that I am not all-seeing. It is a recognition that I do not in fact control everything in my life, every minute of every day, nor do I have all the answers. It is also an opportunity to open myself to new insights about living.

In short, it is an opportunity to let go.

You see, it is the clinging that causes the second arrow to do so much damage.

Each of us can, no doubt, look at our lives and see any number of potential turning points that might have moved life into a different path.

So what?

We made the choices we made, the rest is entirely irrelevant. We can either wallow in regret, or perhaps even bathe in guilt and shame for some of our choices if we wish, or we can learn and grow and make more enlightened decisions in the present. We can accept that each choice was the best choice we could make under the circumstances, or we can beat ourselves up over it. If we could have made a different choice, we would have done so...we didn’t. That’s it.

That each of us has experienced all sorts of different pains in life is not a matter for debate. From a personal perspective though, what is of significance, however, is that sometimes I have also shot myself with the second arrow thereafter. Sometimes I have chosen not to do so.

So my closing thought is simply this: The second arrow, holds the power to do way more damage to me than the first arrow.

I can leave the second arrow in the quiver, or I can fire it at myself over and over.

My choice.

Entirely, my choice.

Did you get the point?

Or...did you get the *point*?

***“Moving towards the light
- even if you’re just crawling -
is your soul’s great achievement.”***

Judith Orloff

The All-Seeing...I

It seems to me that in recent months I have been doing a lot of introspection and reflecting on the trajectory of my life.

Interestingly, in our Toastmasters meeting, last week a question was asked in Table Topics that related to notion of being able to go back in life and change some choices we made. It wasn't my question, and I did not have to answer it, but it was amusing to me because it related to exactly to the drift of my introspections.

If I could go back and change one thing in my life, what would I change? An exercise in rhetoric.

Like I said in the last article, it is possible for me to see any number of turning pints in my life, where a different choice would have led to a radically different life path.

Suppose I never became a martial artist, or left England to pursue a doctorate in Canada? Suppose I had never taken an academic position in Mississippi or never had a son? Suppose I had not gone to Oriental medical School or moved to Wyoming thereafter?

Life is full of these imponderables.

Simple fact of the matter though, is that I like where I am, doing what I am doing. From my perspective in this moment, I am doing exactly what I am supposed to be doing, learning and growing in exactly the right ways for my life's journey.

Had I made any other choice in my life, I would not be here, now, doing this...I'd be doing something else.

So is my life full of mistakes, failures, right choices and success?

Yes.

Well...and No!

There have been unwise choices, selfish choice, blind choices, supposed failures and mis-steps. There has been pain that I have caused to myself and to those around me, but had any of those events not happened I would not be where I am now, with all its own gifts and questions, certainties and doubts.

And so it is with each of us, I suspect.

At any given moment along the way, I thought I knew what I was doing, but I certainly did not see this outcome as it actually exists.

When I was twelve, I saw myself as a university professor in Geology, but didn't see myself in Canada doing a doctorate or in Mississippi for a thirty-year career. When I left England to do a doctorate in Canada, it never dawned on me that I would never go back to live in England, nor did I see the price or gifts of that decision to both my family and myself.

When I was a university professor in Mississippi, I didn't see myself taking early retirement and going back to school to get a degree in Oriental medicine.

I certainly cannot see what will unfold from here, either.

I can, however, embrace the journey, open myself to learning and growing, live with a sense of awe and wonder, and an incredible gratitude for everything that has transpired.

All along the way we are each involved in the discovery and re-invention of self.

From this perspective, there have been no mistakes, no failures, no right choices and no successes...there has just been the journey and making the best choice in each moment.

At every step along the way, I have been blind. For sure, I have had a vision and goals, and still do for that matter. But I could see neither the price nor the outcome of each choice I made along the way.

At each stage though, I made the best choice I could in the moment. Others might judge me for those choices, but they are not me, nor have they lived my life. And there is the trap...I can also judge myself for those choices, which can lead to pride or regret in equal measure, depending upon my perspective.

I choose a different path...I choose a path of gratitude and of humility in the face of an awe-inspiring universe.

I am not all-seeing. I am frequently clueless, blind and a stumbling fool. At other times I can move with awareness, grace and a lightness of touch.

I am all of these things, and yet again, I am none of these things...I am simply on an unfolding journey that has led me to this place in time and space, and I have a choice about how I see that too: It is my choice to view my life through the lens of embracing opportunity.

So why say all of this?

Cut yourself a little slack.

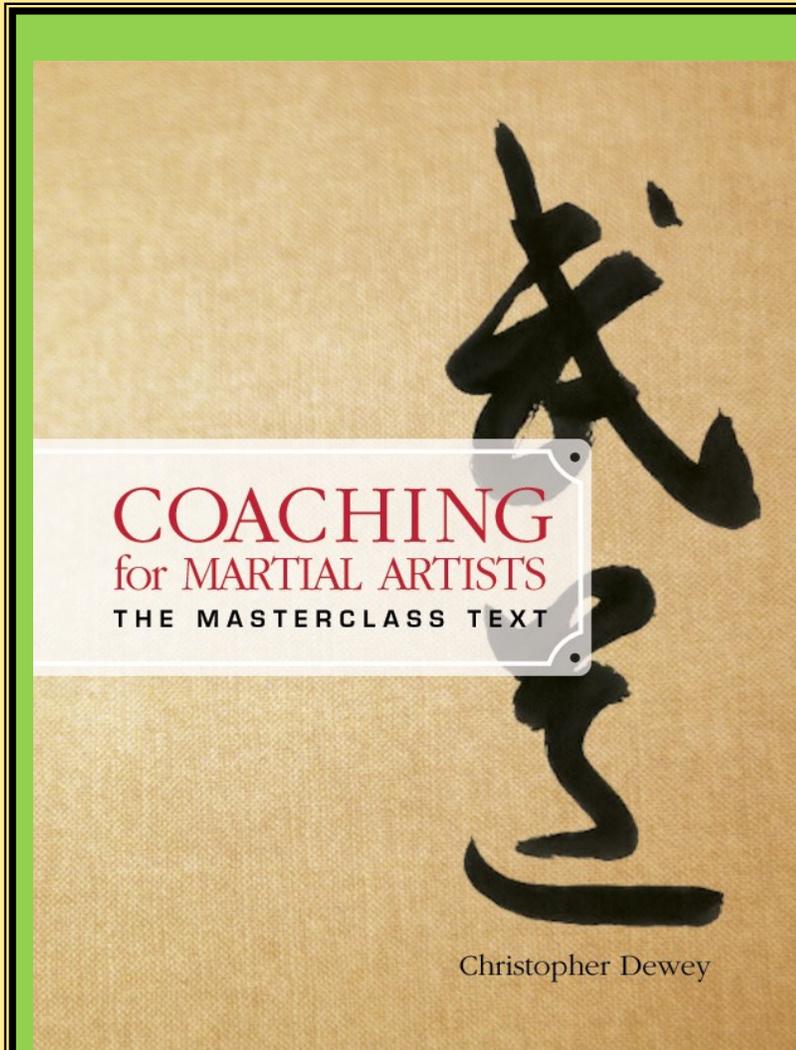
Unless I am missing something, not many of us are all-seeing. Most of us stumble and fall, most of us also soar on occasion.

All of us have the opportunity to be grateful for the totality of our lives...no matter what led us to wherever 'here' might be.

©

“Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether they are worthy. That is not our business, in fact it is no-one’s business. What we are asked to do is love, and this love will render both ourselves and our neighbours, worthy.”

Thomas Merton



**For those of you who
teach
in the martial arts.**

Content:

- **Conditions of Learning**
- **Communication Skills**
- **Pedagogy of Coaching**
- **Psychology of Coaching**
- **Physiology of Training**
- **Physics of Coaching**

...and more.

Only \$25
(plus tax and S&H)
direct from the author.

**For a 10% discount on a three-month life-coaching
package contact Chris at: 662 769 5522
or send an e-mail to: chris@thirdpathway.com**

